

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

*Pub B1*

1. A communications method for transferring electronic data between users of a communications system, the method comprising:
  - delivering an e-mail message from a sender to at least one recipient; and
  - upon opening of the e-mail message by the recipient, indicating the online state of one or more of the sender and any other recipient of the e-mail message.
2. The method of claim 1 further comprising sending a message to at least one of the sender and any other recipient based on the online state.
3. The method of claim 2 wherein the message comprises an instant message.
4. The method of claim 2 wherein the message comprises an e-mail message.
5. The method of claim 4 wherein the e-mail message comprises an invitation to join the communications system.
6. The method of claim 4 wherein indicating the online state comprises displaying a graphical user interface to the recipient.
7. The method of claim 6 wherein the graphical user interface comprises an icon positioned next to an e-mail address in the e-mail message.
8. The method of claim 1 wherein indicating the online state comprises indicating whether the sender is online, offline, or not a member of the communications system.
9. The method of claim 1 wherein indicating the online state comprises accepting a request to check user online state.
10. The method of claim 9 wherein the request comprises at least one e-mail address.
11. The method of claim 9 wherein the request comprises an Internet protocol.

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2 12. The method of claim 11 wherein the Internet protocol is hypertext transfer  
protocol.

1 13. The method of claim 9 wherein the request is initiated by a client of the user.

1 14. The method of claim 9 further comprising sending a redirection command based  
2 on the online state.

1 15. The method of claim 14 wherein the redirection command comprises a uniform  
2 resource locator.

1 16. The method of claim 1 wherein indicating the online state comprises establishing  
2 a persistent connection to an instant messaging server.

1 17. The method of claim 1 wherein indicating the online state comprises checking a  
2 control port.

1 18. A computer program for transferring electronic data between users of a  
2 communications system, the computer program being stored on a computer readable  
3 medium and comprising instructions for:  
4 delivering an e-mail message from a sender to at least one recipient;  
5 upon opening of the e-mail message by the recipient, indicating the online state of at  
6 least one of the sender and any other recipient of the e-mail message.

1 19. The computer program of claim 18 wherein the computer readable medium  
2 comprises a disc.

1 20. The computer program of claim 18 wherein the computer readable medium  
2 comprises a client device.

1 21. The computer program of claim 18 wherein the computer readable medium  
2 comprises a host device.

Sub 21

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22. The computer program of claim 18 wherein the computer readable medium comprises a propagated signal.

23. A communications apparatus for transferring electronic data between users of a communications system, the apparatus configured to:  
deliver an e-mail message from a sender to at least one recipient;  
upon opening of the e-mail message by the recipient, indicate the online state of at least one of the sender and any other recipient of the e-mail message.

24. The communications apparatus of claim 23 wherein the communications apparatus comprises a client device.

25. The communications apparatus of claim 23 wherein the communications apparatus comprises a host device.

26. A communications apparatus for transferring electronic data between users of a communications system, the method comprising:  
delivering means for delivering an e-mail message from a sender to at least one recipient; and  
indicating means for indicating the online state of at least one of the sender and any other recipient of the e-mail message upon opening of the e-mail message by the recipient.

FIG. 21